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*On the "CIDER-TRUCK" SYSTEM in some parts of the WEST of  
ENGLAND. By EDWARD SPENDER.*

[Read before Section (F) of the British Association, at Bath, September, 1864.]

A POPULAR English novelist has laid the scene of one of his tales in a Devonshire town, and has set his hero to achieve the arduous task of converting the inhabitants from the love of bad cider to that of good beer. Mr. Trollope confides to his readers his belief that Luke Rowan will be unsuccessful, and those persons who are well acquainted with Devonshire and the other cider-producing counties will be inclined to share in the opinion expressed by the author of "*Rachel Ray*."

The making of cider is one of the few manufactures of the West of England. The members of the British Association will find this district in most respects the very reverse of that in which they held their last meeting. Somersetshire and the adjacent counties are essentially agricultural, and this very manufacture, of which we have spoken, is carried on in the farm house, and within the very shadow of the orchard. It gives few tokens of its existence; no chimney stack or spoil bank indicates its presence; it scarcely appeals to the senses at all. It is quite possible that it may be overlooked altogether; and yet the writer who should attempt to do for the western counties that which Dr. Wilson did in his most interesting paper last year for the northern, would present a very imperfect picture if he did not describe the influence produced upon the labouring classes by what has been called the cider system, or, with less euphony and more precision, the cider-truck. The single fact, that the agricultural labourers in the cider-producing counties, and especially Herefordshire and Devonshire, receive from 20 to 50 per cent. of their wages in cider, is sufficient proof of the immense influence of this manufacture on their condition. Viewed as a question of political economy, one cannot but be surprised that, while the laws against the truck system in the mining and manufacturing districts are so stringent, the agricultural labouring class should be left so completely to the mercy of the employer. There is no article of consumption which is more liable to adulteration than cider, consequently there is none in which the purchaser under the truck system is more likely to be imposed upon by the seller. That the Act 1 and 2 William IV, cap. 37, for rendering the truck system illegal, was not extended to the agricultural districts, was no doubt due to political rather than

to politico-economical considerations. Dread of the opposition of the landed gentry had far more to do with this limitation than any logical principle had. Moreover, while the miners and factory operatives loudly demanded this protective measure, the farm labourers, less sharp-sighted and alive to their own interests, took no part in the agitation;—more than that, a large number of them would feel aggrieved now if such a measure were extended to meet their case. To give them money instead of cider would displease many of them, even though they would still be at perfect liberty to buy the cider for themselves.

But what is cider? Is it food or poison? or both, or neither? According to an analysis made by Professor Voelcker, an imperial pint of cider drunk by Somersetshire farm labourers contained more than 94 per cent. of water, and a minute fraction of flesh-forming matters. Compared with wheaten bread, the difference of nutritive power is enormous. Thus—

	Cider Contains	Bread Contains
	Parts.	Parts.
Water .....	94·21	36
Flesh-forming matters .....	·02	8
Heat-producing „ .....	5·57	56
Mineral matters .....	·20	—
	100	100

Hence, according to Professor Voelcker, a person would require to drink nearly  $8\frac{1}{2}$  gallons of cider in order to take into the system the same amount of carbon, or heat-producing constituents, as is contained in a pound of wheaten bread; and in order to obtain the same amount of nitrogen, or flesh-forming constituent, he would have to swallow 32 gallons of cider. Compared with meat, the difference is of course far greater. Cider can, therefore, scarcely be called food. It would be going too far, on the other hand, to call it poison—that is to say, when it is pure—but the cider drunk by the lower classes is rarely pure. It is too often a noxious compound of chemicals which produce diarrhoea and colic. To make the cider given by the farmers to their labourers, the “cheese,” as the apple-pulp is termed, having already given a first and a second quality, is expected to give a third; but the strength and the flavour of the cheese have long been exhausted. It is usual, therefore, to throw a cold decoction of hop over the cheese, and, by way of giving it acidity, to place a piece of blanket soaked in melted sulphur and lighted in the bunghole of the cask. By this means sulphurous and sulphuric acids are generated,

with very disagreeable results to the drinker. It has been stated that cider produces rheumatism, and that a large number of the patients at the Mineral Water Hospital in this city come from the cider districts. The case-books of the physicians and the surgeons to the hospital scarcely bear out this idea. There seems, however, to be one form of disease connected with cider drinking, which is due rather to the adulterations than to the cider itself. The symptoms of this disease resemble those of lead poisoning, and probably do actually arise from lead poisoning. If this be so, the circumstance must arise from the action of the sulphuric acid above-mentioned upon the lead vessels into which the cider is sometimes poured.

Whether pure cider be or be not wholesome is not the matter at issue in the present paper. The labourer does not get pure cider; he gets a beverage of such a kind that it does unquestionably injure his health. A medical man, long resident in the very centre of the chief cider district of Somersetshire, has stated that a failure of the apple crop has the same favourable effects on the health of the labourer as the good drainage of a parish has on the health of the inhabitants generally. The excessive quantity of cider drunk during harvest time is another source of illness, and often of accidents. Many farmers will give their labourers at such a time an unlimited supply of cider, under the mistaken notion that it will stimulate them to work better. With such licence given him a man will drink from 8 to 20 pints a-day. The effects are serious. This vast quantity of an alcoholic drink vitiates the blood, by preventing the removal of excretions at the very time that the excretions are being increased by the waste of the muscular tissue which the use of alcohol causes. Even if no serious effects follow the unlimited absorption of cider, the farmer makes a great mistake in permitting it. It cannot be too emphatically remembered that stimulants call forth strength, but do not give it. Supposing that the labourer, under the influence of large potations of cider, works more vigorously to-day, he will work much less vigorously to-morrow. He has been drawing upon his capital of strength, and all the cider in the world will never replace it. Had he chosen a diet of bread and meat and cocoa, he would have been keeping his capital intact. Nor is this mere theory. The question has been fairly tried. The late Reverend W. J. Connybeare relates a case, in which 80 acres of grass were mown, harvested, and stacked by men who abstained altogether from alcoholic drinks, and who accomplished their work far more quickly than any other mowers in the neighbourhood. Both practice and science, therefore, shew that cider is certainly not food, and it would seem that the adulterated cider commonly drunk is not very far short of being poison.

Leaving chemistry for political economy, we are at once struck

with the thoroughly unscientific nature of the cider-truck system. It is, in fact, more unscientific than that species of truck which is forbidden by the Act of thirty-four years ago. Under that system the employer did not sell his own produce at a certain fixed sum, not to be altered according to the changes in the money value of that produce. But, in this case, the farmer gives a fixed quantity of cider in lieu of wages, irrespective of the rise or fall in the value of cider, caused by the scarcity or abundance of the apple crop. The result is, that just as the farmer is receiving the least return, he is making the greatest outlay. When a poor apple crop reduces his profits, he is paying the highest wages; while when, on the contrary, the apples are abundant, and he could afford to pay his labourers highly, he is really paying them less than usual. Supposing the cider to be genuine, the farmer in a bad year may be paying wages at the rate of 18s. per week, while in a good year he will be paying at the rate of 12s.; this fact alone is a strong inducement for the farmer to adulterate the favourite beverage. He cannot afford to give good cider in bad times, and having once formed the habit of adulterating, he cannot lay it aside when there is no need to resort to it.

There is another strong objection to the system, derived from politico-economical considerations. While the ordinary truck system, improvident as it is, does allow the labourer a choice of articles to be received in lieu of money, the cider-truck permits no such liberty. The labourer is glutted with one article, and that article one which, considering the amount of his wages, he cannot afford to have at all, much less to have in such quantities as this arrangement forces upon him. In Herefordshire, it has happened that a farmer paid his labourers 9s. a-week in money, and during harvest time nine gallons of cider a-week. He was then selling similar cider for 1s. a gallon; so that the labourer was actually receiving 50 per cent. of his wages in cider. Were this beverage ever so harmless, it would have been an act of the most reprehensible extravagance for the man to have spent half his income in drink. A person of the upper classes, who squandered that proportion of his income upon his cellar, would run the risk of an inquiry into his sanity by the Lunacy Commissioners. Yet not only is nothing said in opposition to the extravagance of the labourer, but he is actually forced to commit it.

Even in less glaring cases, where the proportion of the wages paid in cider is 20 per cent., the principle is equally bad, and the results little less lamentable. The mere fact that a man, who is a husband and a father, forces a fifth of his earnings down his throat, and sees his family condemned, by the smallness of the money he brings home, to forego the taste of meat, this reflection must in time harden him and make him intolerably selfish. Were the labourer compelled to spend a fifth of his earnings on snuff or tobacco, the

hardship would be apparent at once; but as the farmers' interest consists in getting rid of the cider, the labourer's interest is altogether disregarded. He is made the receptacle for so much liquor, and he and his children are deprived of the animal food that wages paid entirely in money would have enabled him to procure.

It has been urged, in behalf of this system, that it prevents the labourer from resorting to the drink-shop. But it is of small advantage to the labourer to be drenched, *volens volens*, by his master, instead of at his own option by the publican. The man who drinks 9 or even 5 gallons of cider a-week may perhaps have small inducement, so far as the drink is concerned, to enter the public-house; but the desire for companionship draws him thither, and once there he must spend something for the good of the house.

As a matter of fact, in spite of the cider-truck, cider shops abound in the western counties, and are frequented by the agricultural labourers who, having already sacrificed from a fifth to a half of their wages by receiving a payment in cider, are now prepared to spend a portion of the money residue in fresh libations. It is absurd to suppose that a system so subversive of the first principles of prudence would teach the labourer economy and self-denial. The cider-truck enforces selfishness, and it is not to be wondered at if selfishness prevails. Under any circumstances, that professedly paternal system by which the employer undertakes to determine for the employed what he shall eat and drink, and wherewithal he shall be clothed, is highly objectionable, inasmuch as it destroys the independence of the employed; and when the only operation of that system is to provide that the employed shall spend from a fifth to a half of his earnings in drink alone, it has not even the recommendation of paternal consideration.

There are some ways in which the principle may be adopted almost without objection. The farmer who allows his labourer to purchase of him wheat or flour or bacon at cost price, or who lets him a piece of garden as a part of his wages, confers a real benefit. But for the advocate of the cider-truck not one good word can be said. He encourages improvidence and intemperance on the part of the labourer, and he virtually robs the labourer's wife and children of the necessaries of life.

Great and obvious as are the evils connected with this system, they are by no means easily remedied. When men suffer from a wrong, the redressers of that wrong count upon the assistance of the sufferers. But in this case the sufferers acquiesce in the wrong, and resent redress. The great majority of the older labourers prefer the present usage to that of paying them the whole of their wages in money. The drinking habit becomes confirmed, and the drinker likes to drink with an easy mind. His conscience would perhaps

smite him were he to spend 5s. or 9s. a-week at the cider-shop when he was receiving 14s. or 18s. ; but he has no compunction when this extravagance and selfishness are veiled under a custom which he did not originate, and for which he does not feel responsible. It is sadly illustrative of the baleful moral effects of this system, that while the young and newly-married labourer, whom custom has not rendered selfish, will generally prefer to have the whole of his wages in money, in order that he may take them home intact, the labourer grown old under the cider-truck system will prefer that system, though he has not only a wife but a family of children to support. The moral nature has been corrupted, and a factitious appetite for physical stimulants has been created, a craving that is remorseless in its selfishness. Hence the opponent of the cider-truck is told by its supporters, that they who are most concerned approve of it, and that it is absurd to make a grievance out of that which is generally approved.

Nor is this the only difficulty ; while the reformer is deprived of the allies that he expected, he has to encounter very formidable antagonists in the advocates of the present state of things. A few years ago a series of questions with regard to the cider-truck were largely circulated amongst the farmers of the cider districts, and in the answers the farmers, to a great extent, supported the continuance of the system, some honestly and openly, and the rest probably secretly, "because," to use the words of the most outspoken, "a good deal of cider is made in the district." In a fruitful year the cider is made sometimes more rapidly than it can be disposed of. In Herefordshire, for instance, a few years ago the small farmers, not having casks for their new supply, made a cask or two at a time, and then drank it off as fast as they could for fear of the remaining apples being lost. Of course, under such circumstances as these, it would be difficult to persuade the manufacturers to deprive themselves of one of their chief markets. This objection would however be met, were the manufacturers more desirous of obtaining quality than quantity. There is no doubt that the quality of cider has degenerated during the last half century. This ought not to be, now that railways have opened distant markets, and now that greater wealth is available for the purchase of luxuries.

As in most things, the chief difficulty in abolishing the cider-truck is in the outset. When both employers and employed are wedded to the system, it is very hard to obtain even an experimental alteration. Where that preliminary difficulty has been overcome, the experiment has generally succeeded. Several influential agriculturists, especially in Somersetshire, have, *proprio motu*, substituted a money payment for cider, and, as a rule, the labourers have after a time approved of the change. But, to produce satisfaction, it is absolutely

necessary that the labourer should feel he is receiving a fair substitute. Although the political economist may see it would be for the benefit of the labourer if he were to receive only a penny even in cash for every shilling's worth of cider, it is not to be expected that the labourer himself will see this. The Englishman of all men will insist upon having his full money's worth. If he has engaged a vehicle for a journey, he will ride in it the whole way, although his inclination prompts him to walk a part of the road. So the farm labourer will, if his cider is commuted into money, expect the very uttermost farthing. This may lead to disputes, especially where the farmer has been putting a higher nominal value on the cider he supplied his labourers than the cider was really worth. But even this question is not so likely to be fertile of disputes as the present system, which gives rise to endless quarrels about quality and quantity, and often causes much enmity between employers and employed. Moreover, in the first case, the dispute once settled is settled for ever; whereas in the latter it is perennial. In fact, the substitution of the money payment is analogous to the settlement of the tithe question by the Tithe Commutation Act; and just as this Act put an end to the interminable heart-burnings between the clergy and the farmers, so the payment of wages in money instead of cider would get rid of the present wrangling between the farmer and his labourers. But while the monetary compensation was fixed by the legislature in the first case, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to make a similar provision in the second. All that the legislature can do is to extend the operation of the Truck Act to the agricultural districts, and the two parties interested must make some equitable agreement as to the details for themselves. That such a consummation should be obtained, is to be devoutly wished, on the score both of good morals and sound political economy.

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